

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing
on
“Safeguarding the People of Nagorno-Karabakh”

June 21, 2023- 2:15 p.m.
2360 Rayburn House Office Building

STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Submitted by:

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The Western Azerbaijan Community has significant concerns regarding the recent hearing on Armenians living in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, held by the Tom Lantos Commission, which was established by the US Congress with a declared goal of promoting human rights internationally.

First of all, we shall emphasize that it is crucial to provide a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the situation between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Armenia's human rights violations against Azerbaijanis are immense and unprecedented in scale and magnitude.

Armenia expelled all Azerbaijanis from its territory between 1987 and 1991, followed by its use of force against the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and occupation of 20 percent of latter's territories. These actions resulted in the displacement of 700 thousand Azerbaijanis from occupied territories, in addition to the nearly 300 thousand Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia.

Thousands of Azerbaijani civilians were killed, Azerbaijani cultural and religious sites, graveyards were destroyed both in Armenia and the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijani private and public property and infrastructure were plundered. Armenia obliterated hundreds of Azerbaijani towns and other settlements. Armenia also laid millions of landmines in the formerly occupied territories of Azerbaijan, with the sole objective of complicating the safe return of Azerbaijani IDPs to their homes after liberation of those territories from Armenia's decades-long, devastating military occupation.

We are deeply concerned about the demonstrative bias exhibited by the speakers at the hearing. It is disheartening to learn that some of them have close ties to pro-Armenia interest groups. This raises questions about the objectivity and fairness of the hearing, as it seems to have been influenced by a predetermined narrative. The substance of the contributions at the hearing was

deeply flawed and failed to accurately represent the actual situation. It was marred by outright lies and a pervasive anti-Azerbaijani rhetoric that lacked a solid foundation of factual information. The misleading narratives presented during the hearing only served to perpetuate a one-sided perspective, disregarding the facts, complexities and historical context of the situation.

In particular, the repeated use of religiously biased language by the speakers is deeply troubling. The Tom Lantos Commission is meant to promote the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which recognizes the equality of all human beings, regardless of their religion. By using vocabulary that shows religious bias, the Commission pointedly failed to uphold its own objectives, values and principles.

The disregard for the rights of Azerbaijanis, especially those expelled from Armenia, is deeply disappointing. It brings into question whether the Commission truly values the rights of all individuals, regardless of their ethnicity and religion. It also appears that the Commission ceases to care about the rights of a population group once they are expelled from their homes. This selective and dangerous approach undermines the credibility and fairness of the hearing.

All these clearly show that the Commission's hearing was not truly about human rights but rather seemed to serve certain malicious interests. While we recognize that each state and group is free to defend its interests, it is unacceptable to misuse the noble idea of human rights, including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, for such purposes.

Furthermore, the hearing undermines the ongoing efforts to establish peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as it perpetuates a divisive narrative and adds a further obstacle to the path of reconciliation.

The hearing represented a regrettable chapter in the history of the Tom Lantos Commission. In light of the Commission's obvious omissions and biases, we call on the Commission to engage in meaningful effort that acknowledges and upholds the rights of over a million ethnic Azerbaijanis, who have been suffering by Armenia's ethnic cleansing and other crimes against humanity. It is crucial for the Commission to recognize the fundamental rights of Azerbaijani individuals who have been forcibly expelled from Armenia. We urge the Commission to actively engage in sincere dialogue with our Community to rectify its shortcomings and address the injustices faced by Azerbaijanis. Specifically, we call on the Commission to work towards ensuring the safe and dignified return of Azerbaijanis from Armenia, a fundamental right that is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Background information

Armenia forcibly expelled all Azerbaijanis from Armenia in 1987-91. The Western Azerbaijan Community is an organization dedicated to uniting Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia and advocating for their right to return in safety and with dignity. The organization was created in 1989. The Community operates in full respect for the norms and principles of international law.

Its main document, the Concept of Return, was circulated as official documents of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council on 14 March 2023, under the reference number of A/77/801-S/2023/134.